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# CHANGING IDEALS IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

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# CHANGING IDEALS IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION.

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Theological education in America is passing through the greatest crisis in its somewhat uneventful history. The searching and persistent criticism through which the Theological Seminary has been and is still passing, amounts almost to an onslaught. It is now almost ten years since the first gun of the campaign was fired, at the International Congregational Council in Boston. Since then there has been a general fusilade from educators, from the church, from the ministry, from the by-standers. In spite of many random shots, the attack has been, in the main, well justified, well directed and effectual. Unquestionably the Theological Seminary needs amplifying and modernizing. And slowly but surely,—although some seminaries are still wedded to their idols,—the requirements of the age are being met.

The changes in Seminary instruction and atmosphere have been in the main in three directions—that of *freedom, scope* and *practical efficiency.* As regards *freedom,* there can be no doubt that the Theological Seminaries have been, as a rule, more characterized by formalism than by freedom. They have been regarded by the churches, and have more or less regarded themselves, as guardians of the faith once delivered to the saints. Endowed and sustained for the most part, by the churches, they have feared lest they should fail to represent the viewpoint and to furnish the kind of theology desired by the churches. Conscientious as is this attitude, it does not reflect the warmth of confidence out of which the truest service springs. The churches should have trusted the Seminaries to follow the light as it came to them, and the Seminaries should have taught their students the difference between truth scientific and truth pedagogical, between feeding people with new truth and throwing the food at them in chunks. The result of this relation of the seminaries to the churches has been, too often, either estrangement or subservience. To the outsider the latter has appeared the ruling attitude. The Seminaries have come to be regarded as shackled institutions, inert, antiquated, unfree. And all the time the common conviction has been steadily growing that *freedom* is the only right atmosphere for the acquiring and imparting of truth. As well have a chemical laboratory in a cellar as a theological Seminary, metaphorically speaking in the basement of a church. There must be light and air and liberty. The age demands it; truth demands it.

This need of freedom helps to account for the movement of the Seminary toward the University. The University atmosphere is inherently and necessarily that of freedom (except when some multi-millionaire lays a repressive hand upon it.) Truth for truth's sake; honest, unflagging, disinterested pursuit of truth —that is the very essence of a University. And that is the atmosphere in which a Theological Seminary must work. Educators

know that, students know it, and the churches themselves are coming to recognize it. Hence the expansion of atmosphere of these later years, in our Seminaries, the sense of room, the joy of complete commitment to the spirit of truth. In this atmosphere, and in this alone, can the old fascination and joy in theology return. In this atmosphere it cannot fail to return. "For we brethren are called for freedom; only let not our freedom be an occasion to the flesh, but through love let us be servants one to another."

The second particular in which a change has been demanded and is coming in theological instruction, is that of *scope*. Modern knowledge and modern life have undergone a marvelous enlargement. Every thoughtful person today shares the feeling of Balboa when he looked out for the first time upon the Pacific. How vast life has become, how rich, how full of opportunity! We cannot shut down the horizon of the minister to one book, one system of thought, one method of work. If any man needs breadth of vision it is he. If any man can use varied methods, avenues, enterprises, instrumentalities, it is he. Does he not touch life on every side? Must he not know it, in the large and in the minute, in the rough and in the refined, in the physical and in the spiritual, in the past and in the present, in the scientific and in the philosophical, as well as in the religious? Not that he can know it all. But he must touch it all, glimpse it all, sympathize with it all, and in well-chosen directions he must dig as deep as he can. Granted that his central interest is religion. Where does religion begin and where does it end? Not with the church, not with Christianity, not with Hebraism, not with the means of grace. Religion is as wide and deep as life and flows through life as Emerson's River through the Muskatequit.

"I see the inundation sweet,
I hear the spending of the stream
Through years, through men, through nature fleet,
Through love and thought, through power and dream."

The growing life of Religion has split the shell of the old Seminary curriculum and beside the less succulent growths of the old regime, Greek and Hebrew, Systematics, Church History and Homiletics, we have the green and burgeoning shoots of Sociology, Psychology, Religious Pedagogy, History of Religion, Ethics, Literature, Methods of Charity and various forms of applied Christianity. Surely it is Spring-tide in the Theological Schools.

Once more. There is a marked advance in the direction of greater *practical efficiency* in training for the ministry. It is high time that this should be the case. The brunt of most of the criticism of theological training in recent articles in the *American Journal of Religious Psychology, Bibleotheca Sacra, The Outlook* and others falls at this point,—lack of practical training.

But not one of the critics has put the need of practical training half so forcibly and cogently as has one of our theological professors and one of the leading Semitic scholars of America, Professor George F. Moore, of the Harvard Divinity School, in his address upon the *Training of the Modern Minister* before the National Congregational Council in 1907. "The ministry," says Professor Moore, "is a practical calling, like law or medicine, and preparation for it should be directed, unified and limited by the practical end." But, let us never for an instant imagine that this sort of practical training, that any true practicality, can be had without sound rational principles back of it. Professor Moore recognizes this and insists upon it as earnestly as upon the practical side. "Practical Christianity," he says, "without an adequate and effective theology would be a decadent superstition—a survival of practices when the ideas which gave them vitality and significance had ceased to actuate men, carried on for a while by the momentum of an impulse once imparted, but inevitably running down, because sustained by no continuous power, and a theology which does not produce and maintain a practical Christianity accordant with its fundamental conceptions is doomed to death by its own barrenness." So sane a presentation of the relation of the rational to the practical is not often heard just now. In these days of insurgent Pragmatism, when men are arguing for building a house and making the plan afterward, for doing things in order to find out whether they are worth doing, it is well for us to stop and ask whether it isn't worth while to tie theory and practice a little more closely together. If we do not have a care we may find ourselves in the predicament of the old New England farmer of whom Dr. Twitchell tells, who hitched up a pair of young steers to a stone boat and got aboard. In relating his adventures he drily remarked that "he hadn't gone ten rods before he see'd his mistake." We of the Pragmatistic age will find our mistake before we've gone ten rods, if we start out to do things in order to see whether they work or not. No institution, least of all a Theological Seminary, can afford to separate truth and conduct, principle and practice. It is our business to wed them in vital, potential intimacy, as they were wed in the life of the Master.

With a right understanding of the relation of the practical to the rational and spiritual, it cannot be too strongly reasserted that Theological education needs to come into closer contact with life. To train men to be "makers and menders of men" is indeed, as Dr. Hume put it, the true purpose of a Seminary. How to attain this, how to think, to plan, to preach, to work to this end—that is the task in training to which the Seminaries are setting themselves with a will,—although the world in general has not yet found it out. Freedom, scope, efficiency—these are the ideals of theological education at the present time.